

Sir Norman Birkett, K.C., before Osgoode Hall graduating class.

Mr. Treasurer and Masters of the Bench.

(After recalling his own graduation day, Sir Norman said:-)

You will be told that with present day keen competition that your prospects for success in your chosen profession are, well, practically nil. My own experience has proven that by hard work, by devotion to duty, success is sure. And I can only say to each newly called barrister at law I wish for him the utmost possible success.

The profession of the law is a great and a noble calling and I think the first qualification for any barrister at law is, not that he should be a scholar, not that he should be versed in the intricacies and obligations of the law; not that he should be a man of high culture, though all of these things are expedient if not essential. But the supreme qualification of any member of the legal profession, of any barrister at law is that he should be a man of honor. Ours is a great and noble calling and demands that we who come to it should at least be men of character. The first supreme, paramount, overwhelming consideration is that we of the legal profession should hold the flag high.

In the British isles, I know, and I have no doubt the same is to some extent at least true here, lawyers are regarded sometimes with great distrust. I think Dean Swift had a good deal to do with this, in his satire about lawyers paid to make black appear white. And Lord Macaulay added somewhat to the feeling. There is a mixture of distrust and admiration for the lawyer. And our duty is to maintain the standard so that men everywhere shall realize that in any well ordered state, in any civilized community, there ought to be a body of men who have given up their lives, devoted their talents, to the preservation of the principles of justice in that community as between man and man.

The obligations of the great calling to which we are admitted

are many. The first and the supreme qualification is that we should do nothing to tarnish the great reputation which has been handed down now through so many ages of man.

I said ~~first~~ in my judgment the essential qualifications do not lie in the knowledge of the law. I may not be facetious but it is a surprising thing what success can be had on a modicum of the law. Study the art of expression. Study the arts of speech, for the spoken word still is perhaps the most potent and most powerful instrument given into the hands of men. It is worth care. It is worth research. It is worth study. Juries today are still influenced by the spoken word. If I may say so with bated breath, judges also are not immune. And nothing can please a judge better than being orderly, lucid, in the presentation of the argument or the facts, with the carefully chosen word, and the right word. Nothing will aid you more in the task to which you are now to give your lives than to study the arts of speech, the arts of expression.

Do not be a lawyer only. Read widely. Keep a high cultural background. Be a friend and companion to the wise spirits who have written our poetry and prose. Saturate yourself with their ideas and words. And insensibly moulding the whole of your life including your expression will be influenced helpfully.

To every man who devotes his life with sincerity of purpose to the profession to which he belongs, and does his duty in that sphere, and retains his own self respect because of the standard of honor he has set before him, there is no failure. Whatever the world counts success or failure he has succeeded.

end.